



Press Release

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.
Michigan, 14th District



Ranking Member, U.S. House
Judiciary Committee
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus

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Conyers Opposes Baker/Carter Commission Report
Discriminatory ID Requirement Will Make it Harder for Tens of
Millions of Citizens to Vote

Rep. John Conyers, Jr., Ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee and founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus, issued the following statement opposing the Baker/Carter Commission Report on Election Law Changes, released this morning:

“I am shocked that this Commission has decided to take us several giant steps back in the march for voting rights by recommending a national ID requirement for voters. This would inevitably disenfranchise minority voters and the most vulnerable among us — those who live in poverty and the elderly. While I continue to believe that the 2004 elections showed our desperate need for election reforms, this misguided and highly controversial recommendation makes this Commission’s entire report — regardless of the merits of other recommendations — dead on arrival from a civil rights and voting rights perspective. As a result, I am unalterably opposed to these discriminatory new requirements and will encourage my colleagues in the House and Senate to join with me in doing so.

As the work of this Commission proceeded, I have made no secret of my view that it I thought it had substantial procedural shortcomings that stood in stark contrast to the Carter-Ford Commission of four years ago. Rather than gathering facts and then developing policy recommendations that follow from those facts, this Commission appeared to have developed its recommendations and simply went through the motions of a fair and deliberative process. At the very first hearing of this Commission, this voter ID proposal was mentioned twenty-two times.

The lack of a fair and open process like that used by the Carter-Ford Commission was evident throughout. In the last commission, civil rights groups submitted research, reports, and testimony. This time around, civil rights groups were essentially barred from the process. The only input from the civil rights community (Barbara Arnwine from the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law) was essentially ignored on this critical issue. It speaks volumes that the public could not participate in a process that would effect their most fundamental right, the right to vote. Moreover, the Commissioners spent only a short time deliberating on these issues.

If they had spent more time on the issue, they would realize that there are incredibly few documented cases of voter fraud to even respond to via legislation. Essentially, the Commission would have us create a massive and intrusive new bureaucracy, and one that discriminates and disenfranchises, in order to deal with a non-problem.

As a whole, the national ID requirement would place steep new hurdles in place for more than ten percent of voters, who currently do not have a photo identification card but are otherwise eligible to vote. Though the Commission’s report proposes giving away those cards to voters who cannot afford them for “free,” this is an empty promise. The Republican Congress has a consistent record of imposing mandates on the states and then failing to fund the implementation of such mandates. Even if the new cards are cost free, there is little doubt that the ID offices will prove inaccessible or expensive to access for many.”

As a whole, this type of voter ID requirement has a regressive approach to electoral fairness, and would have the effect of tilting the playing field toward the wealthy and powerful. Conyers and other civil rights champions have raised the following concerns with the National Voter ID Requirement in the Baker/Carter Recommendations:

- **A national voter ID card would create new barriers to voting.**

Georgia, Indiana, and Arizona have enacted new voter ID requirements that – if upheld -- will suppress voting among eligible voters, particularly seniors, the poor, racial and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and urban residents. These are people who are least likely to own motor vehicles or possess a driver's license — the most commonly accepted form of identification.

- **A national voter ID requirement will likely lead to discriminatory implementation.**

In 2001, the Carter-Ford National Commission on Election Reform found that identification provisions at the polls are selectively enforced. Even in places that do not require voters to show ID, poll workers are known to ask certain voters to prove their identity, in many cases demanding ID from minority voters, but not whites.

- **A national voter ID card is legally questionable and challenges established voting rights law.**

Because voter ID requirements make it much more difficult for citizens to exercise their right to vote and increase the chance that eligible, registered voters will be denied their right to cast a ballot, they violate the spirit if not the letter of both the Voting Rights Act and the Constitution.

- **An ID card system will lead to a slippery slope of surveillance and citizen monitoring.**

A national voter ID card system would significantly diminish freedom and privacy in the US because once put in place, it is unlikely that such a system would be restricted to its original purpose. A national voter ID system would threaten the privacy that Americans have always enjoyed and will gradually increase the control that government and business wields over everyday citizens.